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Bet You Missed It

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Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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Publishing Entropy by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

André Schiffrin, director of the *New Press*, takes a stroll through the Frankfurt Book Fair and comes up with a bleak report. Every big name in English and American publishing is now part of a media conglomerate. Bertelsmann buys Random House and buys Barnesandnoble.com and Barnes & Noble buys Ingram Book Company. European publishing has submitted to English as the century's dominant language and is jockeying to get in on the big profits. We dominate as both produc-

ers and consumers and then impose our tastes and preferences on the world. The traffic is flowing heavily from the U.S. to Europe — best sellers, American pop culture. Even the once massive Soviet publishing industry is reduced to putting out Russian language editions of *Playboy* and business texts. See—André Schiffrin, "Transnational publishing in microcosm: the Frankfurt Book Fair" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, p.B6, Nov. 20, 1998.



Rebel Journals in a Competitive Industry by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

First came learned societies and then the big scientific publishers. Along the way, scientific journal prices skyrocketed. SPARC, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition is trying to drive prices back down. More than 100 major research libraries have agreed to

buy upstart journals at sometimes as little as one twentieth the price they have been paying for a similar journal owned by a big publishing conglomerate. See—Carol Yoon, "Soaring prices spur a revolt in scientific publishing," *The New York Times—Science*, p.D2, Dec. 8, 1998.

Croatian Med Journal Seeks the Big Time by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

A Zagreb immunologist hopes to do his bit to make Croatia a "normal" country by editing the 2000-circulation *Croatian Medical Journal*. The owner/editor is pleased to see that *JAMA* has run summaries of his articles. He's hoping to be indexed in ISI's *Current Contents*. The index's clini-

cal-medicine category includes 1,064 publications selected out of an estimated 16,000 existing journals in the field. But his long-term goal is a listing in *Current Contents*. "If we make that, I'll die. My job is finished." See—*Wall Street Journal*, p.A1, Nov. 24, 1998.



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Mapping the Heavens by Martha Whittaker (Academic Book Center)

Attention map librarians. The **Sloan Digital Sky Survey** is planning to bring you an atlas of the universe. The first phase of the project will be limited to the Northern Hemisphere — the entire visible sky, except for the part obscured by the Milky Way. Phase two will do the same for the Southern Hemisphere. The project is partially funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, which put up the initial \$10 billion. Another \$77 million is coming from

federal agencies. A 100-inch telescope on site in the Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico is scanning the skies and collecting 8.5 megabytes of data every second — enough to fill a standard compact disk in a minute. The first photos were taken in May this year and it is estimated that it will take 5-7 years to complete the task. See — **Petit, Charles W.**, "Mapping the Heavens," *US News & World Report*, (June 22, 1998), p. 56 - 57.

"Cheap Eyeballs" For the Masses by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

If you want a cheap "ad-hocracy," the Web is your tool. Newspapers, radio and TV are all alive and well. Each new invention failed to kill off the previous tools. But the Internet was definitely a big player in the November elections. T.V. remains the "mass-iest" — grabbing the most human attention at a given time, but many close races were definitely won by the Web. **Jeb Bush** had one of the fanciest Web sites,

and **MoveOn.org** launched a 300,000 strong chain letter urging censure and moving on. Some speculate that the Internet is positioned where TV was in 1952. But **Kennedy School Dean Joe Nye** warns: "When information is free, the scarce commodity becomes attention." See — **David Nyhan**, "The World Wide Web beginning to be a political player," *Post & Courier*, (NY Times News Service) p.A17, Dec. 8, 1998.

Competition Be Good by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

For-profit **Phoenix University** is the face of all morbid fears of the academy. 53,000 adult students in business spread over 32 states with no campus life and basically adjunct, untenured faculty. No libraries, laboratories or seminars. **Alan Wolfe**, of BU, however, notes that universities which expanded during the Boomer years made their own pact with the devil. Unable to shrink after the Boomers passed, they reached out for any and every form of job-training educational program: police, business, hotel management, health professions, computer programming. Liberal arts was kept alive only by the general education requirements. Curriculum was dumbed-down, adjuncts were hired in droves, seminars were run by grad students. Rampant professionalism on the faculties begat a training so narrow that professors lacked the broad knowledge

needed to effectively teach undergrads. The mega-universities in fact developed the techniques that Phoenix would find so profitable. Meanwhile, the big universities acted like monopolies, charging what the market would bear in tuition. Competition was inevitable and will be a positive thing. And because Phoenix lacks an ability to compete in the areas of general education and the liberal arts, these subjects may end up flourishing. Wolfe says the prestigious colleges will barely notice that Phoenix exists. It is the ones that expanded in the sixties — branch campuses of state universities, former "normal schools" made into four year colleges and working-student colleges that must adapt to the competition. See — **Alan Wolfe**, "How a for-profit university can be invaluable to the traditional liberal arts," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, p.B4, Dec. 4, 1998.

Tort Lawyer as Savonarola by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

The scientific method has its built-in error-correcting process. Even **Nobel** prize winners mess up, but over time, it all comes out in the wash of the free flow of information. Now plaintiffs' tort lawyers are terrorizing researchers for both what they publish and what they don't publish. Two sentences left out of a 1958 journal article on asbestosis got the scientists sued in 1994. Negligence law is being substituted for peer review and the universities are

taking a hit in higher insurance costs and chilled enquiry. Scientists fear they will be obliged to cry wolf whenever a lab result shows a potential danger from a product or substance. And then they risk being dragged into oppressive Discovery if their results do not fit what the lawyers for the plaintiffs want. See: **Sheldon Steinbach**, "How frivolous litigation threatens good science," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, p.A56, Dec. 4, 1998.

Rumors of Their Demise by Martha Whittaker (Academic Book Center)

There's a lot of talk among librarians and library vendors in these days of electronic publishing and online bookstores about the future of book vendors and subscription agents. An article by **Warren Cohen** takes a look at "disintermediation" from a consumer's perspective and comes out in defense of the middleman. He says, "... the demise of the middlemen has been greatly overstated. In the digital age, many will continue to play a valuable economic role. A retailer's most important function is to gather similar wares from a variety of sources." He illustrates

his point by asking the reader to imagine using the Internet to negotiate directly with farmers for fruits and vegetables. Cohen further points out that book publishers know how to find quality writers, and how to package, market, and distribute their ideas in a truly value-added fashion. But Cohen also notes that the Web makes comparison shopping easier. He suggests that the perfect metaphor for the future of the Web is "survival of the fittest middlemen." See — **Cohen, Warren**, "Same price.com," *US News & World Report*, (May 25, 1998), p. 59.

AOL-Netscape—What's Bad for Techies is Good for Consumers

by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

The **AOL-Netscape** merger holds promise for ordinary folks who want to use online services without constant frustration. **Netscape** made the World Wide Web popular. AOL flooded it by giving access to the masses. But AOL is focused on service and the merger will speed the move to

Internet boxes on top of TV sets as a substitute for personal computers. A simultaneous deal with **Sun Microsystems** which controls **Java** programming will give it a further boost. See — **Wall Street Journal**, p.B1, Dec. 3, 1998.

The Cynicism of Big Mergers - Quelle Surprise ! by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

An article on mergers of big companies notes a pretty cynical profiteering attitude by CEOs. If a big exec has a golden parachute, he sees no need to resist a takeover. Where the acquiring company CEO has a big stock option, the merger may make the value of the stock jump. He cashes in without regard to the long-term

effects. And aggressive accounting may make the merged company's financial statement seem larger than it is. See — **Gretchen Morgenson**, "A cautionary note on mergers: bigger does not mean better," *The New York Times—Business Day*, p.C1, Dec. 8, 1998.

